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Copy of letter to Rev. G. Armstrong.

Geneva. Oct. 9. 1843.

My dear Sir,

I received, at Frankfort, your kind letter, & should sooner have replied to it. but the rapidity of my journey had rendered it quite impossible. It affords me much pleasure to hear of the deep interest, which so many of the British Unitarians feel in the great question of Slavery as at present agitated in the United States, & particularly in the relation, which their brethren of like faith there, sustain to it. — When I landed in your country, it certainly was with no expectation of being called publicly to express in it, my opinion of American Slavery. But it did not require a long acquaintance with English Unitarians to convince me that they were not indifferent to the subject of Slavery in the United States; that, on the contrary a deep & inquiring interest was felt in it by many of them.

I heard with much satisfaction, that an eminent American Unitarian minister, while recently in your country, had had his attention repeatedly called to this subject. Under these circumstances, I could not but feel desirous that your views & opinions might be known in my own country. Accordingly, when, at the time of the annual meeting of your West of England Unitarian association at Taunton, I was desired to address the crowded evening meeting, & the subject of American Slavery was particularly allotted to me, I expressed the wish that those who were present, & the Unitarians of Great Britain generally, might

This is the letter which

address an earnest appeal & remonstrance, on this subject, to the
brethren in America. I said, I had no doubt that such a re-
monstrance would be viewed, by some, as an overzealous act on
your part; but that I believed the great body of American Unitar-
ians would give it a candid hearing, & that with them it would
do good. I was confident, also, that the spirit with which
you would put forth, such an address, would entitle it to such a
hearing. I believed that you felt, as I did, that Great Britain
had too recently given freedom to her own Slaves, to warrant her Son
in addressing their American brethren in words of bitterness or taunts.
I was happy to find that the wish I thus expressed, met with a cor-
dial response from very many present. Subsequently, at a
meeting in Glasgow, I ventured to repeat the same wish. On my
arrival in Dublin, it was with no small pleasure that I learned that
the Unitarians there, without waiting for hint or suggestion from any
one, had already acted in this matter, & that a Committee of several
gentlemen, among whom were Rev. Dr. Drummond & James Haughton
Esq. had prepared an address to the Unitarians in America, on the sub-
ject of Slavery, & had sent it to the care of a much esteemed
brother in Boston. It has repeatedly been said to me, that, in order
that a document of the kind above spoken of, might be signed with a
proper understanding of the question at issue, some further informa-
tion was needed by the great body of Unitarians in Great Britain.

That information, in a thorough & perspicuous manner, I do not pre-
sume to think I can give, without a single document or memoran-

-dum at hand to which I can refer. But to some points I can speak. Let me however say, that it is to me a most unwelcome & painful task, in my absence from my native land, & from those with whom I have associated, & with whom I have taken not only pleasant, but most profitable counsel from my youth, to dwell upon what I deem her faults, or theirs. —

Moreover there is something in the very fact of uttering aught like reproof, which ~~may~~ savors of an assumption of superiority, which I would wholly deprecate & have cause enough to avoid. God knows how truly I have honored, & still honor many who for some cause which I cannot satisfactorily, to myself explain, have taken no interest or part in the discussion of this mighty question, touching their brother's rights, his happiness, his entire moral condition. God knows if many of us have not allowed our respect for these, to blind us too long to their indifference to this matter - involving as it does, the essentials of the Christian character - involving as it does the giving or the withholding all the rights of humanity, all the blessings & hopes of religion, to millions of our fellow men in our very midst.

I do indeed believe that American Unitarians (here speaking of them as a body) have been unfaithful to their religion, & untrue to those principles of God's Paternal character, & his equal regard for all the human family, & the Brotherhood of man, which they have been wont to claim as peculiarly characteristic of their own faith - Unfaithful to these, in the opposition or the indifference they have manifested to the Anti Slavery question. It would be unfair in me not

to say here, Sir that my very premises would be denied by Unitarians generally in America. The assertion there is common, to be heard from the lips of nearly every one, - we are no friends to Slavery - we deem it a great evil - We are as much opposed to it as any one. So much as this, nearly every one feels it necessary to say for himself, assertions of this kind, however, as every one may see, nothing worth, unless the word be supported by deeds. And here, I believe that our American Unitarian body, in common with nearly every other so called religious body in the land, has been signally wanting. There has been with us, not perhaps a vehement & bitter, but still a strong & determined opposition to the introduction of the subject of Anti Slavery, in any form, into the community.

I have myself heard an eminent & influential Unitarian minister express the wish that the subject of Slavery might never again be mentioned in the association to which he belonged. —

— For a long time it was with great difficulty that any article of decided Anti Slavery Character, could obtain admission into the Christian Examiner, & some such were refused. A series of articles proposed to be furnished for the Christian Register, (there the only newspaper of the denomination) by a venerable & amiable minister was refused. He is a man whose character & whose years both entitled him to be heard; nevertheless, the columns of the paper were sealed up against him; and, what is even worse, this violation of what Unitarians have even professed to contend for & highly to value, - the right of free discussion on moral

religious subjects - passed ² with but little notice, & with scarcely a rebuke. I rejoice to say that opposition of this character, in our body to the Anti Slavery movement, has very much passed away.

The Christian Examiner is now quite liberally open to Anti Slavery articles. None of its readers can have failed to be interested by the able articles on different points of the main question of Slavery, which have appeared in it of late, from the pen of Rev A. P. Peabody of Portsmouth - New Hampshire. This is perhaps the most encouraging evidence of progress in the present state of the question among us as Unitarians.

But it has not at any time been, as it seems to me with active opposition to the Anti Slavery enterprise, that American Unitarians are chiefly to be charged. Their great unfaithfulness has ^{lain} been in this - that, with more than 2 millions of their fellow Country men in Slavery, in a condition of utter degradation, bought & sold, worked, fed & treated generally like cattle, they have done nothing in any proportion to their ability & influence nothing to cause this national sin to be understood, repented of, & put away; They have refrained from lifting up the voice of righteous condemnation of the foul & wicked system, in the name of the religion they preach, & of the master who is dishonored & denied in the outrages committed on his brethren.

They have feared the agitation consequent upon a plain & direct utterance of Christian truth touching this thing - & they have failed thus to apply to the evil the great & sovereign remedy which almighty wisdom has afforded - the truth as it is in Jesus. Abolitionists maintain that truth, faithfully & perseveringly uttered & applied, would cause,

yea will cause, this evil, gigantic as it is, to tremble & totter & fall. But how shall men hear this truth, if they who have vowed before God to be ministers of the religion of his Son, keep it back; how shall others believe if they manifest distrust of its effects?

I shall not be understood to say that this failure to apply the truth of Christianity to the existing Institution of Slavery among us, has been universally true of American Unitarians.

The names of Dr Channing & Dr Follen are well known in your Country, not better known as Unitarians, than as earnest pleaders for the outcast & despised Slave. Others too, there have been among us, & still are, not as well known with you, but well known with us, - not ministers only, but laymen not men only but women, who have labored long & well, through evil report & much ridicule, and perils of false brethren, with even more tangible evidence of the unpopularity of the part they were espousing. It is a fact which I hope I may be excused for naming with something of a feeling of pride, that some of the earliest, most unflinching, most ready to give of their time, efforts & money & every way most trusty friends of the Anti Slavery cause, have been & still are Unitarians. But in doing these things they have been looked upon coldly, & have not escaped decided opposition.

With such exceptions as these, I do believe that American Unitarians are chargeable with having done nothing, nothing in comparison to their influence & ability, to expose the true Character of the institution of Slavery amongst us, & towards its abolition.

It is true that there are but few of our ministers who do

not, occasionally, once or twice a year it may be, bring the matter of Slavery before their people, so far as to call it a great evil, to avow themselves its enemies, & to express the hope that it may be made to cease; but as a general rule, so far as my knowledge & enquiry have extended, this language has been accompanied, as an offset, ^{for their vehemence, their intolerance and their ultraism,} with a sharp rebuke of the Abolitionists, for in that word, I believe their sins may be summed up; of the effect of which kind of preaching every one can judge. I have reason to believe that the effect of such allusions to Slavery is to quiet, not quicken the conscience.

I do believe that whatever of a sound & healthy public sentiment now exists among us, touching this subject, is owing, under God, to the persevering, fearless utterance of Anti Slavery truth by those who have taken the scorned name of Abolitionists. Some will doubtless think that it has been with good reason that their American brethren have distrusted & disliked what they have deemed the vehement & uncompromising spirit of many Abolitionists. But these will also doubtless feel that no such objection could surely exist to the Anti Slavery efforts & appeals of such men as Mr E. Channing & Charles Follen. Alas! for our true honor as a denomination.

When Dr Channing first made it known by a timely & vigorous act, that he was not of the number who thought Slavery was to be brought to an end by letting it alone, that moment did the zealous admiration of many for him, become cold. This was a common & very general observation at that time, made by those who, living more directly than myself in the circle of Dr Channing's

acquaintance, were qualified to speak. But farther, it is with my own knowledge that many of his ministerial brethren, & those among the most influential, regarded Dr Channing's espousal of the Anti Slavery cause as a weakness - an ill judged part for him to take.

Indeed an opinion to this effect was publicly put forth in one of our journals, a regret that Dr C. by the course he had taken, had parted with or compromised his moral influence over so large a part of the nation. Do not understand me to say that any one, among Dr C's ministerial brethren, could lose their respect for him. Respect & esteem cannot be withheld for

any one, I think, who is believed to be doing what he honestly deems it his duty to do. But, that Dr C. was censured, privately & publicly that deep regrets were felt & expressed by Unitarians extensive for what he did in the Anti Slavery cause cannot be denied.

Nor is less than this true of that other name - also a sainted name - which I have written. No one knew better than Dr Follen that to espouse the Anti Slavery cause was to peril one's reputation for a sound & prudent mind, was to peril one's share in the good will of the community at large, was to peril one's opportunities of obtaining that, which no man ever more truly merited than he, an honorable competence for himself & his. No one knew this more than Dr Follen - probably no one complained of it less.

I have felt unwilling in this communication to introduce the name of any now living save that I have done ^{so} ~~it~~, in one instance, in allusion to the author of certain articles in the Christian Examiner, where the name

was already in fact publicly known. Did I feel willing to do otherwise, I could mention the names of some venerable for years or for Character, who have not hesitated to espouse the Anti-Slavery cause & to utter its truth plainly.

In noting the above facts, I have done, as far as time & circumstances allow, what I could to meet the request which has been made repeatedly to me, that I would furnish some information upon which Unitarians in Gr Britain could act in addressing some communication to their brethren of like faith in America, on the topic of Slavery. I have endeavoured to write no word which should not be according to the truth, But I feel bound to add that I hope no one will act solely upon the ground of what I have written. It is but just that an opportunity should be given to refute any of my statements; should any one consider it worth while to undertake a refutation. I know not that I act wisely in committing these few sentences to your charge, as you request, for publication. So much, or rather so little, as this I may say - that I would not knowingly, say a word, unjustly, to the derogation of ~~any~~ brethren, I do honor them; I honor and love the principles which they profess; but I also do desire that those principles may have free course, that justice may be done to them, so far as man can do it, & that it may be to the present & eternal praise of every individual among us, that he has done what he could for the subversion of every form of injustice & iniquity & for the establishment

of Christ's kingdom of righteousness & truth.

Should you, our British brethren & friends think it good (as I trust you will) to exert your unquestionable influence with us in this regard. I believe you will have done a good work - that many ~~hands~~ minds will be found ready to hear & weigh well what you shall say; they will assuredly view it as the act of friends & they must view it as the act of persons free from those local connexions, which are often thought to warp the judgment, & give it an exclusive or party bias.

In passing through Berne, in Switzerland, a few days - since, I was much struck by a simple motto inscribed over the gateway of one of their charitable institutions - "Christ in pauperibus." It seemed to me to be full of the very spirit of Jesus Christ himself. How else can we show our gratitude to him? what can we do for him, save to recognize him in every brother man, and for his sake, do what we may that our brother may be comforted & healed & saved?

"Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye do it unto me" "inasmuch as ye do it not unto one of the least of these - ye do it not to me"

Whatever you may address to us, whatever we may receive from you, may it be offered & accepted in that one spirit, which I cannot better express than by repeating

the words, "Christo in pauperibus."

Believe me, dear Sir,
with the sincerest respect
and esteem, your friend
and Brother in the faith,

(Signed) Sam^l May Junr,

To the
Rev. Geo. Armstrong
Bristol. England.

This is the letter which
brought much censure
on me from the leading
Unitarian Ministers in
Boston & vicinity. —
Being questioned sharply
by them, at the Berry
Street Conference (in
May, 1844?), I said I had
nothing to keep back, and
offered to read to them this
letter — and I did so,
at the afternoon session,